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THE GERMAN VENUSBERG

In his article in the last number of the *Journal* Mr. Remy does me the honor of finding my views as to the origin of the Venusberg so great an obstacle in the way of his own theory concerning the nature of this famous abode of the amorous queen, that he devotes a long foot-note to them. In fact, by a process of elimination which constitutes the main body of his discussion he disposes of all the various theories heretofore advanced and arrives at last at his own, which is briefly this. The *Venusberg* is a fusion of a Germanic dwarf-hill and a Celtic amorous queen. I fear that the evidence which Mr. Remy adduces in support of this theory does not suffice.

The whole difficulty arises from the narrow view-point which Mr. Remy has taken of the *Venusberg* question. The *Venusberg* myth did not come directly from some ancient prototype: there were intervening stages of development, differing forms in which this fundamental Germanic idea appeared all through the centuries until at last a more enlightened civilization no longer gave it credence. The form preceding that which we now know by the name of *Venusberg* was the Grail. The fundamental idea is that conception of the other-world or the beyond peculiar to Germanic lore,—the hollow-mountain abode of the departed.

From the frequent presence of dwarfs in *Venusberg* accounts Mr. Remy argues that the hollow-mountain feature of the place goes back to a dwarf-hill idea, which, as he says, shows no traces of the love element. But dwarfs are by no means always mentioned in descriptions of the *Venusberg*. True as it may be, furthermore, that dwarfs were supposed to live for the most part in hollow-mountains, yet not every hollow-mountain abode was conceived as a dwarf realm. The hollow hill was also the home of the departed, a heathen paradise. Proceeding from this assumption of his Mr. Remy cites from the *Tanhäuserlied* the line:

nembt Urlaub von den Greysen.¹

¹ Grässe. *Der Tannhäuser und Ewige Jude*, p. 55.

or as it reads in another version :

nemt urlob von *dem greisen*!²

Greisen he understands to mean *dwarfs*, and notes as of special significance the plural used in three out of the four *Tanhäuser* songs where the line occurs. I cannot agree. *Urlaub nehmen* in the folk song plainly means *get permission to leave*. *Tanhäuser* begs Venus for it when he says :

nun gebt mir urlob, frewlin zart³

After she sees at last that there is no keeping him, Venus exclaims:

Danhauser, is sölt urlaub han...

nemt urlob von dem greisen!⁴

By which she means the authority is not with her, but resides with another. Who may the dwarfs be to whom Mr. Remy would have us believe *greisen* refers? Elsewhere are the lines:

ewer selend dienen mine zwerg...

ich han so vil der edlen zwerg

helt die müssen dienen dir.⁵

The dwarfs within the mountain are *servants*, and only as such do they appear in the accounts of this hollow-mountain paradise. They are here because the nature of the place has suggested them, not because every idea of a hollow-mountain abode goes back to a dwarf hill. Their position is however subordinate, as to higher beings. Such was the relationship between dwarfs and gods in early Germanic times. We should hardly expect *Tanhäuser* to be bidden go to the servants for permission to leave. Once indeed we find the line written *von dem Greisen*, and this I take to be the true sense; the plural is a mere senseless corruption. And the old man of the mountain means the ruler of this paradise. *Wodan* was known as *der Alte vom Berge*. His place was later taken by a number of heroes, among them *Arthur*. In the *Wartburg-krieg* *Arthur* is king of the Grail realm within the mountain and sends out heroes, who must, of course, get *Urlaub* from their chief. What we have in the *Tanhäuser* story is a work-

² Ibid. p. 43.

³ Ibid. p. 42.

⁴ Ibid. p. 43.

⁵ Ibid. pp. 34, 33.

ing over of the old myth concerning a heathen paradisaical kingdom ruled by a god who from time to time sends out heroes and later receives them back to himself.

Grimm long since showed that the myths of *Kyffhäuser*, of *König Dan*, of Arthur in the hill, and of *Wodansberge* and *Venusberg* are all forms of the furious host myth or next of kin thereto. In this list we must include as well the mountain of the Grail about which Dietrich of Niem writes. The furious host is, as Grimm points out, the pagan other-world seen from the Christian point of view according to which the inhabitants of a former paradise now appear as a host of demons. This paradise, essentially unchanged, passed over into the Grail and *Venusberg*, and *der Greis* of the *Venusberg* is Arthur of the Grail.

The absence of an amorous queen in these versions which precede the Grail and *Venusberg* is not so serious a matter as to compel Mr. Remy to roam afield into Celtic literature. Whether she was or was not present in the old heathen paradise in the form of fair women matters not at all. In all probability she was. If not, the medieval mind with its riotously sensual thinking would have been sure to add this element in the reconstruction of the pagan paradise. I feel bound to say also that *The Voyage of Bran* to which Mr. Remy refers does not seem to me to be so certainly the product of a primitive people of the seventh century unassisted. The whole, including the account of a queen who forcibly attracts a hero to her island abode, savors too much of classical influence, and when we remember that Greek and Roman culture flourished in Ireland long before *The Voyage of Bran* was written, a purely Celtic origin seems even less certain.

There is really no need for leaving Germanic soil in search of the woman in this case. The Germanic paradise, like the paradise of all primitive peoples, was a place of sensual enjoyment. If the descriptions which we have of it seem to emphasize the pleasures of war and wine rather than those of love, this need not argue in favor of a foreign influence for the introduction of the amorous queen into the Grail and *Venusberg*. The effect of Christianity upon the pagan idea of paradise is plain enough. A ban fell upon the whole, and

it gradually assumed the character of a sort of limbo or abode of the damned. So much is well-known matter. This change must be regarded from a slightly different angle, however, in order to understand our *Venusberg*. Whatever had been attractive in the pagan paradise zealous Christianity stripped off clean, and it was a considerable time before these features could be restored even in part. The origin of legends of the *Kyffhäuser* type, representing as Mr. Remy says, "not abodes of joy, least of all love," is to be traced to this unsympathetic handling by the church or its influences. The church could not, however, extinguish entirely the reminiscences of former paradisaical pleasure. The fundamental idea was too deeply rooted, for it went back to the Germanic conception of the other-world. In the *Wartburgkrieg* account we can see evidences that the old idea is returning.⁶

For the sake of the argument I will at present grant Mr. Remy that this is a *bona fide* description of a sacred spot. The place is concededly the abode of the departed,

Artûs hât kempfen ûz gesant,
sît er von diser welte schiet...⁷

is the joyful realm of the Grail;

Feliciâ, Sibillen kint,
und Jûnô, die mit Artûs in dem berge sint,
die habent vleisch sam wir und ouch gebeine.

Die vrâgt ich wie der küninc lebe,
Artûs, und wer der massenîe spîse gebe,
wer ir dâ pflege mit dem tranke reine,

Harnasch, kleider unde ros? si lebent noch in vreche.
die gotin bringe her vûr dich,
daz si dich berihte sam si tete mich,
daz dir iht hôher meister kunst gebreche

Hôrt, wie die selben botschaft eine glocke
Wol über tûsent raste warp,..

Hôrt, wie es umbe die glocke stât: Artûses klingsaere,
die mousten lân ir künste schal,
diu selbe glocke in allen durch ôren hal.
des wart diu massenîe an freuden laere.

⁶ *Der Wartburgkrieg*. ed. Simrock. stanzas 83-87.

⁷ Ibid. stanza 85.

Der Klinsôr tuot uns niht bekant
wer sî der kempfe, den Artûs hete ûz gesant;
ern saget ouch niender wer die glocke liutet.⁸

and is the seat of Arthur and his host;

Wie Artûs in dem berge lebe und sîne helde maere,
der si mir hundert hât genant,
die er mit im vuorte von Britanien lant,
die sint dekeinem vilân sagebaere.⁹

There is no doubt that the pleasures of this place are not of a purely spiritual nature, any more than that the Grail realm which even Wolfram pictures is far from a home for ascetics. Here are women, and plenty, and amusement, so much in fact that at the sound of the bell, which is the call to go forth in service of the Grail,

wart diu massenîe an freuden laere.¹⁰

A number of questions must present themselves to the careful student of these stanzas. Who supplies the aggregation with all the good things of mortal life? What sort of a place may this be of which we are told at one time that its occupants

habent vleisch sam wir und ouch gebeine,¹¹

but in the next breath that Arthur has sent out warriors from thence

sît er von diser welte schiet...?¹²

How, too, do these pagan goddesses find a home here? As a matter of fact, the Grail nowhere appears quite in the light of a duly sanctified place. There is always an indefinable something in its descriptions, from Wolfram on, which puts it outside the pale of what the church regarded as good, and in the *Wartburgkrieg* we surely have nothing short of a heathen paradise. The poet could hardly have spoken what was in his mind more plainly. It is as though he had said, "the thing this Grail most reminds me of is the hollow-mountain paradise."

There is one other point of highest significance which

⁸Ibid. 83, 85, 86.

⁹Ibid. 84.

¹⁰Ibid. 85.

¹¹Ibid. 83.

¹²Ibid. 85.

seems to have escaped Mr. Remy. The Grail realm is elsewhere *on* not *in* a mountain. Wolfram speaks of heroes who

*ûf Munsalvaesche riten*¹³

and plainly has in mind a castle upon some elevation.¹⁴ The poet of the *Wartburgkrieg* has regarded as synonymous Grail and hollow-mountain paradise, and has reestablished for us the lost elements of that old heathen heaven, if in truth these elements were ever really lost. He has made the place again an abode of joy. This too he may have done with no evil implication clearly defined in his mind. From which we can see how Germanic thought kept turning back to its original idea of paradise. If, however, the poet had in view a place quite free from any taint of wrong he chose a strange background. And I doubt whether the thin veneer of a saint and a ritualistic observance entirely unknown to the church of Rome suffices to give the needed sanctity. Mr. Remy makes much of the Holy Grail worship which appears in the *Lohengrin* poem, of which he assumes the *Wartburgkrieg* to have been an original part, and would take me to task for considering the stanzas to which I have especially referred apart from the entire work, accusing me of reaching thereby a forced and one-sided interpretation. I cannot see why we should so consider them. These stanzas go back, in idea at least, to something much older than the poem and independent of it, and the poet's intentions have no bearing upon that phase of the question. In addition to this it seems now generally conceded that the *Wartburgkrieg* is older than the *Lohengrin*, in event of which Mr. Remy's argument falls of its own weight.¹⁵

There is, too, a suspicious amount of attention given to

¹³ *Parzival*. ed. Martin. XVI, 789, ll. 1-3.

¹⁴ This idea was a commonplace in the middle ages: so often of Venus' home. cf. *Johannis de Altavilla. Architrenius*. Bk. I. (Rolls Series. v. 59, part 1).

Jamque fatigato Veneris domus aurea, rerum
Flosculus, occurrit, *monti superedita*, qualem
Cantat odorifero Philomena poetica versu.

¹⁵ Paul. *Grundriss*. II, 215. Elster. *Paul und Braune Beiträge*, 10, 81 ff. Wilmanns. *Zfda*. 28, 206 ff.

the physical comfort and diversion of the troupe within this mountain, and such is directly traceable to the general background. Grimm saw it when he wrote, (*dem Venusberg*) *nah verwandt ist der berg in dem Felicia und Juno hausen*.¹⁶ Meyer seems to be of the same opinion.¹⁷ I am unable to see how Mr. Remy's point that Arthur is repeatedly called *wandels vri* proves much. The epithet is very probably one of those purely formal expressions of which writers of the middle ages made such abundant use. In Sachsenheim's *Mörin* the same term is applied, in a most senseless connection, to Venus herself.¹⁸

And Arthur in a mountain implies an evil conception of the hero. The church did not seem to look upon him as a *persona grata* and it may be that some such argument operated here as in the case of the Grail, with which Arthur was so intimately associated. Two late passages cited by Kaufmann show him in this evil light.¹⁹

Je te saluë mille fois, ô étoile plus resplendissante que la Lune.
Je te conjure d'aller trouver Beelzebuth et lui dire, qu'il m'en-
voye trois esprits Alpha, Rello, Jalderichel et le Bossu du Mont
Gibel.

Cum autem Paternus in ecclesia Mauritania praefata post tantos labores quiesceret, deambulabat, quidam tyrannus regiones altrinsecus, nomine Arthurus: Qui quadam die veniens ad cellam sancti episcopi et ipsum alloquens, tunicam memoratam aspexit et zelo confossus invidiae petivit eam. Cui Sanctus: Non cuilibet magno, sed clerico tantum Deo sacratio haec tunica condigna est. Ille autem indignans monasterium egressus iterumque regressus est, ut eam vi tolleretur. Unus autem discipulorum videns illum in furore revertentem cucurrit ad S. Paternum et ait: Tyrannus, qui hinc antea exivit, insultando cum furore regreditur. Paternus ait: Imo absorbeat eum tellus! Quo dicto statim terra aperuit os suum et usque ad mentum Arthurem absorbuit. Qui illico agnos-

¹⁶ Grimm. *Deutsche Mythologie*. 2, 780 note. cf. also Grässe. *Der Tannhäuser und Ewige Jude*, p. 17.

¹⁷ Meyer. *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*. v. 21, no. 1, p. 23.

¹⁸ Sachsenheim. *Die Mörin*. ed. Stutt. Lit. Ver. v. 137, l. 948.

¹⁹ Kaufmann. *Caesarius von Heisterbach*, pp. 143, note; 146, note. The first passage K. cites from Liebrecht. *Gervasius von Tilbury*, p. 220: the second, from *Vita Paterni*, 2. Act. SS. 15. April.

cens suum reatum, incipit deum et S. Paternum laudare, donec veniam humiliter petiens, terra illum sursum emitteret.

Of the same tenor are the accounts of Gervase of Tilbury and Caesarius von Heisterbach.²⁰ Arthur is here no benignant person, but a devil in a mountain which was regarded as the entrance to hell.²¹ Mr. Remy's statement concerning these latter sources is misleading. Heisterbach plainly says Arthur is *In monte Gyber*; nor can it be argued here that *in* means *on*; such would be a strained interpretation. Germans, and such was Heisterbach, show a tendency to regard these abodes *within* the mountain and the whole context gives this idea. A very interesting comparison may at this point be drawn between Tilbury and Heisterbach. These two contemporaries, the one an Englishman, the other a German, regard Arthur's home *on* and *in* mount Gibel respectively. No more striking example could be adduced of the peculiarly Germanic conception of a hollow mountain realm. Tilbury flourished about 1211; Heisterbach died between 1240 and 1250. The *Wartburgkrieg* was written about 1250. These then are all documents of almost the same period. This does not signify any great holiness for the mountain in the *Wartburgkrieg* poem where Arthur dwells. If it is a holy place it is possessed of a different sort of holiness from that sanctioned by the church.

Nor does the presence of a saint prove much. We may well inquire what the good man is doing in company with Arthur and these pagan goddesses. An embarrassing situation for him surely! In his learned theological discussion of the *Tanhäuser* story, among other things, Mr. Remy has this to say, 'In the Christian mind fairie was associated with hell; the knight who entered the enchanted realm was guilty of apostasy in its gravest form.' St. Brandan is in just such a place; from which I infer the author of the poem had not that deep conviction of his saintliness which Mr. Remy seems to hold. The mountain of the *Wartburgkrieg* is after all the first mile-stone on this road in the development of the *Venusberg* idea from a remote past to the fifteenth century.

²⁰ Liebrecht. *Gervasius von Tilbury*. pp. 12, 13. *Caesarius von Heisterbach*, ed. Strange. XII, XII.

²¹ cf. also Kaufmann, p. 144 on Ludolf von Suchen etc.

Another way-mark is Dietrich a Niem's mountain called the Grail. Here the narrowness of Mr. Remy's view-point again shows itself when he says Niem does not call the place *Venusberg*. Why should he and how could he? The name did not come in until the middle of the century.²² We are dealing not with a name but an idea. The point which is significant is that he is describing a hollow-mountain paradise where the amorous queen is very much in evidence, and that to this place he applies the name *Grail*. The idea which earlier generations called *gral*, those following named *Venusberg*. The two are in a direct line of succession.

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²² Mr. Remy calls attention to the fact that in *Margareta von Limborch* there is no *Venusberg* and I stand corrected. The book was not accessible to me at the time I wrote. I had, however, noted my mistake before Mr. Remy called attention to it, and I may perhaps be pardoned for following no less an authority than the great Jacob Grimm and others after him. Grimm says the name no doubt is there—this before the poem had appeared in print. (Grimm. *Deutsche Mythologie*, 2, 780 note). Grässe, following Grimm apparently, makes the statement that the name *is* there. A peculiar piece of carelessness, for the poem was first printed in 1846. (Grässe. *Der Tannhäuser und Ewige Jude*, p. 17).